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ABSTRACT

In addition to surveying the writings of Henry Holmes Smith, this paper explains his importance as a theoretician and practitioner of photography. After a discussion of Smith's ideas on "reading photographs" and his concerns with the ethics of photography, particularly of photojournalism, the essays in the book, "Henry Holmes Smith: Selected Critical Articles," (edited by Terence Pitts) are summarized and explained. Concern with the human experience is put forth as the idea that unifies these essays. Smith is seen as calling for the openness of the scientist, so that the narrow conception of photography as object-centered representation championed by the tastemakers will not become its exclusive definition. It is suggested that Smith's articles about other photographers, which contain no reference to his own work, nevertheless reveal his own theoretical underpinnings. Image making without the use of conventional equipment or subjects is presented as an important element of a broader conception of photography, and some examples of Smith's work in this vein are included in the paper. (JL)

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DIALOGUE OF DIFFERENCES:
The Writing of Henry Holmes Smith

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CAMERA·LUCIDA

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Dialogue of Differences: The Writing of Henry Holmes Smith

Howard Bossen, Ph.D.

Henry Holmes Smith is photography's other Smith. Unlike W. Eugene Smith whose photoessays are known to millions, Henry Holmes Smith's work is known only to a relatively small number of people. Yet his influence on photography is vast. He is one of the photographic world's eccentrics: to him principle has been more important than profit; pursuit of knowledge and truth more important than the pursuit of fame.

Henry Holmes Smith has been involved in photography as a visual educator, critic, and imagemaker engaged in the exploration of nonobjective and synthetic color photography since the 1930s. He was asked by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy to teach the first course in photography at the New Bauhaus in Chicago in 1937. From 1947 until his retirement in 1977 he taught photography at Indiana University.

He was one of the founders of the Society of Photographic Education. Many of his ideas on photographic education first enunciated in the 1940s and 1950s have become widely accepted. He helped shift the focus of photographic education from science departments, where the emphasis was on optical and chemical experimentation without aesthetic concerns, to fine arts departments where the aesthetic issues of photographic expression could be more freely explored.

Henry Holmes Smith's critical writings about the medium of photography and viewer response to photography are seminal statements in the field. His articles usually take one of two paths. The first involves developing tools to help analyze photographs. The second uses those tools to discuss bodies of photographs.

Prefacing his first article in *Aperture*, "Photographs and Public", is a one line quotation from John Milton. "Fit audience find, though few."[1] The search for an audience coupled with a desire for a dialogue may be seen as primary motives for Smith's writing.

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Smith's articles, appearing in *Aperture*, the most influential journal on photography since Stieglitz's *Camera Work*, in his own mimeo press publications, in *Afterimage* and *Untitled*, and the publication of the Center for Creative Photography's monograph, *Henry Holmes Smith: Selected Critical Articles*, allow one to see a very wide range of ideas expressed in an equally wide range of styles. Some of his articles have lists of questions and statements in them, almost as if these lists were lecture notes. Some of the articles present highly intellectual approaches to analytical problems. Others have characteristics reminiscent of Joycian stream of consciousness.[2]

With the exception of exhibition notes and some broadbased philosophical comments about how his work developed he has not written overtly about his own imagery. Yet it may be argued that when he writes about the imagery of his mentor, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, about Aaron Siskind, Fred Sommer, and his friends and former students Jack Welpott and Jerry Uelsmann he is also writing about his own vision as an imagemaker.

Many photographers Smith has chosen to write about are ones whose vision shares sensibilities with his own.[3] He was clearly influenced as a young man by Moholy-Nagy. Siskind's and his imagery possess similar humanistic concerns and visually share stylistic properties although the genesis of the imagery is very different. Fred Sommer's and his imagery share certain humanistic values. With Welpott and Uelsmann, one finds the inspirational hand of the master laid upon the student. When he writes about these people, Clarence John Laughlin, and issues such as curatorial taste or the practice of photojournalism, he is expressing his beliefs concerning the power, importance, and consequences of photography and its practitioners within our culture.

In his writings on the critical act one finds procedures for image analysis that did not previously exist within photographic literature. He freely and gratefully borrowed ideas from literary criticism, relying largely on I.A. Richard's *Practical Criticism* for the means to create a verbal dialogue with students not attuned to speaking about images. The intent was to help the student/viewer find a means of understanding the emotional qualities of an image, and to move beyond simple object identification in order to find meaning in complex signs and symbols.

In his writings on educating photographers he tends to goad, to cajole, to provoke by making statements which on the surface seem to be outlandish and unsupportable, but upon reflection cut to the heart of the educational issues he addresses.[4] In his writings on photojournalism he presents the ethical isues which confront all concerned with human subject documentary photography.[5] And in his writings on museums, he takes on the narrow-mindedness of institutional practices. He lambasts the curator and collector for being safe rather than innovative.[6]

He writes, more from the position of an *apologist*, in the Church sense, than from the position of one who is trying to make it, in the art world sense.[7] He writes to explain photography to the audience he hopes is there. His need, which might be seen as egocentric, is more accurately understood in the context of the

voice of a man who understands more than most of his contemporaries. Generally patiently, although sometimes impatiently, he tries to explain why their perceptions are being impeded by certain cultural, institutional, and historical biases which retard both the growth of individuals as well as the medium of photography.

That Smith was searching for an audience, however small, is clearly seen in a letter he wrote in 1953 to Minor White, editor of *Aperture*.

> I will continue to send you drafts of material: it is an incentive to write it down to know at last I have an audience. It is actually my first real audience.[8]

This letter was written partially in response to one White wrote in which he said:

> I think you are the first one to respond to APERTURE pleas for articles of intelligence and evidence of thought.[9]

Smith had published writings earlier, but those writings were more process oriented, for example; his 1939 *Minicam Monthly* article on Solarization. He had also developed theoretical/aesthetic materials for distribution. Both his Design Research Laboratory Bulletin from the 1930s and his *On Photography* pamphlet from 1953 which he sent to Minor White are examples. The latter prompted White to invite Smith to begin the dialogue on "reading photographs" in the pages of *Aperture*[10] his first vehicle which held out to him the possibility of visible impact in the field. It remained as his primary publication outlet for his ideas until well into the 1960s.

It has been argued that there was a plan behind *Aperture*, a thoughtout approach to the development of the notion of "reading photographs."[11] It is not true, however, that so coherent a scheme existed. In the early years White rather than being inundated with articles and images was begging for them. The issue of "reading photographs" was one which took an evolutionary course, beginning with Smith's private publication *On Photography* moving into the pages of *Aperture* and from there into the general literature of photography.

Letters between Smith and White demonstrate that the ideas printed in *Aperture* were frequently bounced back and forth in their correspondence.[12] Letters reveal that both men admired each other's intellect and appreciated their open relationship. As the 1950s moved on, White opened the pages of *Aperture* to the dialogue Smith asked for in 1953.

> One of the most important steps in training part of the general audience is to help any interested person realize the rewards of staying with a difficult photograph. I think APERTURE could usefully publish the experience of someone who has noted the

> way he first responded when he saw a photograph he had not seen before, and then has compared this response with what happened when he subsequently saw the photograph, a day, a week, a month and even several years later. Perhaps a small section of APERTURE should be devoted to methods for detailed reading of a photograph.[13]

Smith followed his plea with an example of a reading of one of Minor White's photographs. It is a reading based upon physical description of the image combined with interpretation based upon the associations released by the emotive properties of the image. It is also a cumulative reading, wherein the viewer's past experience of the picture is used to help build toward the present experience which leads to a future experience.

The idea of "reading photographs" is one which occupied the pages of *Aperture* for most of the 1950s. It was an idea extensively examined in Smith's 1956 workshop on photographic interpretation. It is an idea still actively discussed within the photographic community. John Ward in his 1970 book *The Criticism of Photography as Art: The Photographs of Jerry Uelsmann*, uses both Smith's and White's ideas as a backdrop from which he develops his own concepts of photographic interpretation. Terry Barrett in his 1977 article "Reading as a Method of Photographic Criticism,"[14] examines the ideas of Smith and White in regard to "Reading Photographs."

Since the ideas of Smith's are perhaps his best known ones and certainly the only ones which to this date have received critical attention, the ideas on "reading photographs" per se will not be examined in detail. Yet because the idea of "reading photographs" first presented in the classroom, worked its way into his writings on that subject, on photojournalism, on the responsibility of the critic and on the act of interpretation, some discussion is necessary.

In "Image, Obscurity and Interpretation"[15] published in *Aperture* in 1957 Smith first brings his adaptation of I.A. Richard's *Practical Criticism* to the attention of the general photographic community. (Richard's ideas were among several examined with a small group at Smith's 1956 workshop at Indiana University.) The ideas in this article, written for the rather esoteric audience which subscribed to *Aperture*, found their way into the literature in other places too.

In a 1962 article in *Infinity*, a publication for press photographers, Smith also discussed his methodological approach to photographic interpretation. The article, "The Fiction of Fact and Vice Versa," begins by discussing the photographers' ability to deliberately falsify the factual, to make an idiot look like a genius or a genius look like an idiot. In it he questions the motives and abilities of photojournalists and picture editors. He argues that these people have a moral responsibility not to turn facts into fiction. He then proposed, based upon I.A. Richard's *Practical Criticism* a book about the criticism of poetry, a method to analyze the meaning in a photograph.

Smith adapted Richard's terms, "sense, feeling, tone, and intention" to photography. These terms are tools designed to help gain access to meaning within photographs. Sense is "What we plainly *see* in a photograph." Feeling is "What the photographer feels about the object he is photographing or what he thinks about it." Tone is "The attitude of the photographer toward his audience," and intention is "The photographer's purpose in making the photographs."[16]

Smith's writing created tools which helped an audience perhaps more naive than today's picture audience begin to delve beneath the surface of identifiable objects to reach the richness of meaning locked within photographic imagery. These tools Smith forged were amongst the first analytical tools available to the serious picture examiner.

They laid part of the foundation contemporary photographic interpretation is based upon. The strength of these tools rested partly in the intellectual, analytical approach they provided and partly in the fact the system, like the literary criticism it was adapted from, required that the viewer always find support for the interpretation in the image, rather than in things external to the image.

But the approach based largely upon Richard's *Practical Criticism* had its flaws. Response was based mostly upon intellectual analysis and did not allow enough room for emotive and psychological factors. For Smith the system did not prove flexible enough. He moved on to a more complex form of analysis which retained the intellectual strengths of "reading photographs" while allowing him to pursue a more ephemeral examination of the psychological and the emotional qualities in photographs.

Throughout his writings he retains his insistence upon the evidence being found in the photograph. In "Models for Critics", first published in his mimeo press publication *Related papers on the Classification and Appreciation of Photographs and Photographers* in 1963, and republished in *One Hundred Years of Photographic History* in 1975,[17] Smith insists that the critic must come after the photograph, must look to the image for clues as to the problems the photographer is pursuing and the meanings within the work.

> ...it should be stated flatly that the critic, by definition, must come *after* the work, not before it, and, when the work is really new, the critic is seldom familiar with it. This is a critic's limitation, and should be accepted more willingly than it is.

If, then, the critic must look to photographers and their photographs for the models which are to instruct him, how is he to know which models to consult?[18]

Models, as Henry Holmes Smith refers to them, are tools used to gain access to art. Their usefulness depends upon the degree of access one gets to any given piece of art through the employment of that particular model. Not all models are relevant to all pieces of art.

Figure 1 Henry Holmes Smith, "Giant," 1949. Refraction drawing (original version) Courtesy Henry Holmes Smith archive, Indiana University Art Museum. ©1973 by Henry Holmes Smith.

*See cover

Figure 2. Henry Holmes Smith, "Mother & Son," 1951. Refraction drawing (original version) Courtesy Henry Holmes Smith archive, Indiana University Art Museum. ©1973 by Henry Holmes Smith.

When Smith discusses interpretation generally he is writing about the personally expressive photograph; yet, issues of interpretation coupled with issues of ethics find their way into his writings on photojournalism, museum and curators, and education. Smith discusses ethical issues in photographic interpretation best perhaps in his writing on photojournalism. He is interested in finding ways in which photojournalists can report in a more indepth way than is customary in most situations, and in developing a more sophisticated and demanding audience of picture consumers than presently exists.

His praise of Walker Evan's work in "Two for the Photojournalists"[19] reflects his concern for: the photojournalist to explore beneath the surface of events; and to penetrate to some kind of human truth which moves as well as informs the viewer. These themes were picked up and expanded upon by Smith in 1967 when he presented a lecture, "Problems of the Contemporary Photojournalist", at the National Press Photographers Association Business and Education Seminar. In it he discussed: "Your *rights* as photographers of public events, intended to be originators of factual, truthful reports on the public aspects of momentous happenings." He said photographers have: "The right to show what you mean...to *know* that what you show *shows* what you *mean*, and...as a corollary to *know* what you mean." There is the assumption that most photographers, because of a lack of education and because of visually backward editors, are deprived of their rights.

He presents an example of an incident involving a car accident. He asks how can the photographer portray the full dimensions of the tragedy represented by the accident. He stated:

> What a task for photography! To relate the past to the future through the ever present instant. What prospects for tomorrow, for do we really know how to picture these relationships? On the basis of what I see published, I doubt it.
>
> It seems reasonable to me to assume that if we are ever to master the visual aspects of this yesterday-today-tomorrow relationship we need to know more about what photographs are and how they hold the memories they contain:
>
> 1. How much of what we know is really in the photographs, and how much somewhere else entirely?
> 2. What should photographs look like? Isn't that a simple minded question: Should they look like yesterday? If so, how do we know they do? Who told us? Why do we trust them?[20]

And so on. The theme is familiar, the approach that of a master teacher, always questioning, always giving less the answer and more the question.

The presentation of possibilities meant to expand the horizons of his readers is a characteristic of Smith's writing reaching back to his first published articles

related to photography in 1933. His article which presented a photographic collage and a small amount of how to do it commentary, his article on montage which mentioned "shadow pictures" as one photographic form, both from 1933, his Design Research Bulletins from the mid-1930s, and his 1939 article on Solarization[21] although somewhat pedestrian compared to his later writings and visual works all demonstrate an early concern with the extension of visual possibilities and his dominant lifelong concern with light as a transformative element.

Smith's writing may be seen to emerge from a definition of photography wherein the straight camera image is just one kind of valid photographic possibility, where photography's parameters are measured by the limits of light, light modulation and light sensitive material, rather than by the limits of "camera vision." His writing may be perceived as one means of expanding the dialogue on photography.

Perhaps the most pivotal piece in all of Smith's writings is a one page statement "Reading the Photograph" which appeared in 1953 in his self-published pamphlet *On Photography*. In this piece are printed two photographs side by side. On the left is a literal camera made image of paint markings on a segment of a building. There is a rectangle described by painted lines and above it is written "Latest Dope." Next to this easy to read pictorial statement is Smith's *Giant* (Figure 1). There is no direct reference to either photograph. The article begins: "If we think of a photograph as a kind of 'rebus,' it may help us understand the actual problem of reading a photographic image directly." It ends with:

> Other pictures, however, may depict an unfamiliar or completely new form, or if the objects are familiar the relationships may be difficult to interpret. Explanatory words for such pictures may be needed, yet they often short-circuit the careful examination of this kind of image. The result may be similar to reading a partial solution to a puzzle before making a try for the answer.[22]

These two statements and these two photographs lay out the problem Smith pursued in his writings for the next quarter century. He examined the nature of the photographic "rebus" and worked on ways to develop means of interpretation for other's imagery as well as his own. His search, which first took him to art history and art theory, lead him to literary criticism, poetry, philosophy, mythology, anthropology and recently to mathematics. It reflects his understanding that one cannot truly understand photography if one is not culturally literate.[23]

"Reading the Photograph" is very carefully crafted. Without an overt reference to either photograph the viewer is directed to the problem of gaining access to meaning within the nonliteral, nonobject oriented image. Presented with choices, both easy and difficult the viewer is not told the meaning of either image, but is shown how one can go about discerning meaning for oneself.

In presenting Smith's imagery and the rudiments of a system this article may be seen as the beginning point from which his writings about image issues took two general directions. The first sought to develop methods to examine photographs. The second discussed bodies of work in an historical and interpretive sense.[24] The first path contains the prescriptive reading photograph articles; the second path, his essays on Moholy-Nagy, Aaron Siskind, Jack Welpott and Judy Dater, Clarence John Laughlin, Jerry Uelsmann and Frederick Sommer. Although there are these two basic thrusts they are not mutually exclusive and at times both are pursued within the same piece. For example, in an article on reading photographs Smith sets out some definitions and then gives a reading of five Aaron Siskind photographs based upon those definitions.[25]

In 1963, a decade after "Reading the Photograph" appeared, Smith published in a journal with a very small circulation "Representation in Photography."[26] This article like the 1953 "Reading the Photograph" contains reproductions of his work without overt commentary. The commentary on his pictures as in the earlier piece is there in an implied way. As illustrations for this article he included *Mother and Son* (Figure 2), *Pair II* (Figure 3), and *Pseudoform* which he later changed to *Grotesque* (Figure 4).

He presents his alternative concept of the meaning of representation in photography, arguing that when representation in photography is tied to object identification, then the term disallows the vast potential for human expression to be fulfilled and reduces photography to a means of only recording simple facts. He asks a series of questions. He partly answers them by presenting a synoptic view of the issues involved in the imagery of Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind and Frederick Sommer, and by presenting without comment a selection of his own images.

> Important questions remain to be answered: Representation actually of what? Representation in which of several conventions? For what reason? Certainly commonplace assumptions about the visible world provide convenient pigeon holes for some public portion of every art. They are genuinely useful to widen the audience capable of understanding what is being pictured. Yet surely now we know and feel and *see* much more than the garden variety of photography can ever show us. Would it be too much to ask of photography to extend its powers into these regions of human experience? Some observers and some photographers believe it would not be too much.[27]

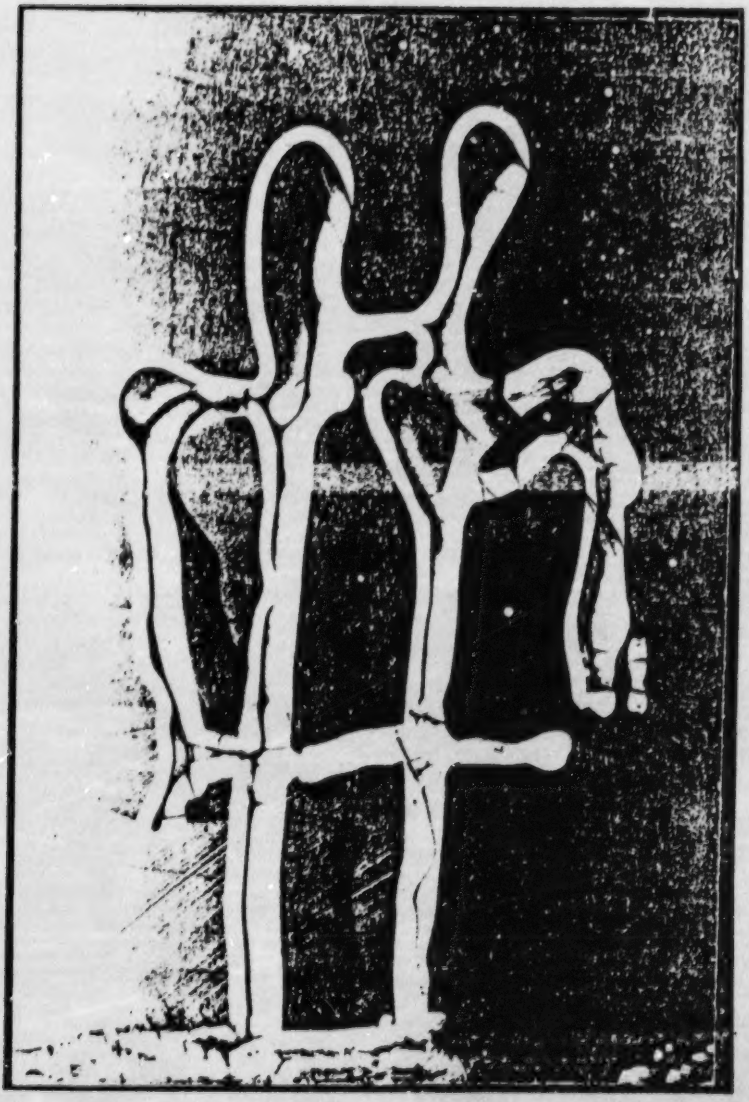

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Figure 3. Henry Holmes Smith, "Pair II", ©1952. (From original version. Refraction drawing) Courtesy Henry Holmes Smith archive, Indiana University Art Museum. ©1973

He proceeds to discuss various kinds of photographic conventions, asserting that a large body of previously systematically excluded work really is part of the tradition of photography.[28]

> It would be wrong to assert that this work is in a new tradition. Actually the product is an extension of an exceedingly early view that was the photograph was a work of both the physiochemical process and of the human being.

Coupling of the mechanical image with the human mind allows for a viewpoint which claims that meaning within photographs can go beyond surface object identification. In fact, it is a position which argues that perhaps the least important quality of most photographs is object identification.

In presenting in this order, Callahan, Siskind, Sommer and his own work he is moving from Callahan who he terms "the most traditional of the nonconformist photographers"[30] through Siskind and Sommer who present progressively more nonconformist imagery while utilizing conventional equipment, to his own work which, without actually being stated, is the most nonconformist of all, at least in terms of physical execution. The work of all four, however, is representational, not in the narrowly construed sense of representing things, but in the wider sense of representing human issues, feelings, fears, fantasies and experience.

Concern with the human experience permeates Smith's writings as an apologist. It is a thread which clearly connects the essays found in the volume edited by Terence Pitts and titled *Henry Holmes Smith: Selected Critical Articles.*[31] These essays generally theoretical and philosophical, sometimes examine the works of others while at the same time explicating and validating Smith's own imagery.

The collection of essays edited by Terence Pitts is structured chronologically with the exception of "XI Zero in Photography," originally published in 1959. This piece precedes the others, which begin with the 1953 "Photographs and Public." "XI Zero in Photography" serves as Smith's introductory statement, his call for openness, his plea for a re-examination of myopic views and anti-intellectual ideas held by many within the field. It presents for the first time science, the second field he went to for models for photographic interpretation.

Figure 4 Henry Holmes Smith, "Grotesque," ©1952. Refraction drawing (original version) Courtesy Henry Holmes Smith archive, Indiana University Art Museum. ©1973 by Henry Holmes Smith.

Previously he had brought adaptations of models of literary criticism into the discussion of photography. With this piece he suggests that photographers might be well served to look too, to the scientists, who of necessity must remain open to the unexpected, receptive to the unknown.

The title "XI Zero in Photography" is based on:

> the name of an atomic particle (XI Zero) with no electrical charge. It leaves no tracks to be photographed in cloud chamber "events." Yet scientists recently made seventy-thousand photographs in an attempt to obtain evidence about it. In one of those pictures, evidence of this particle was deduced from effects that show "the motions of known particles to be peculiarly skewed by something."[32]

Science is expected to be precise, analytical, dispassionate; yet Smith sees in the scientific method, an openness to ideas that photographers, he argues, tend to resist. He rhetorically asks photographers if they "Ought not ...take a lead or two from the practice of these scientists?" And he suggests that: a great deal could be learned from "studying with care" and "subjecting to analysis" a body of work by a photographer; photographers should stop thinking like the lay public so that they can "deal professionally with photographs that show the world of everyday events to be 'peculiarly skewed by something'"; and the photographer should "give as much time and thought to improving his skill in understanding what his fellow photographers can do with ideas" as he has traditionally given to technological improvements. He ends this short piece by stating that if photographers do not begin to study their medium analogous to the way scientists study theirs, then "photography is indeed weak and empty."[33]

It is evident that Smith does not believe photography to be "weak and empty." It is equally evident that he feels the vast majority of those who claim the label of photographer are "weak and empty." It is not surprising that when Smith makes these kinds of statements he creates a certain amount of controversy.[34]

Smith does not go on the attack without presenting a coherent alternative point of view and without understanding historical forces at work. In "Museum Taste and the Taste of Our Time," an essay on "The Art of Photography" an exhibition held in 1961 at George Eastman House, he wrote:

> "The Art of Photography" is too generous a title for a show of narrow range and I will not praise narrowness and call it generous. As I viewed the exhibition in August 1961, I kept wishing it were 1941. Then what an eye-opening, stunning, even inspiring show this would have been. But not now; it is twenty years too late.[35]

It is too late because by 1961 not only had the medium begun to explode in terms of the diversity of approach to imagemaking, but also because the sanctity of the aesthetic position presented in the show had begun to be viewed not as *the* way rather merely as *a* way.

Smith's strenuous presentation of differing viewpoints is based on the assumption that if there is a path photographers should follow then indeed that path has many forks. Each one is equally interesting and valid to traverse.

> One cannot quarrel with any of these conventions, but they must be recognized for what they are. Only when they occupy a position of absolute and exclusive privilege in photography need they be challenged. All of them and others too are only part of *one* version of one of contemporary man's most important visual languages.[36]

Further on in the article he presents an idea opposing "picture taker" with "picture maker." He says that when the "picture makers" were presented in "The Art of Photography" show, they were done so in a way which demolished "for an uninformed viewer the basic potential strength of the esthetic of the maker."[37] He called for a show which would fairly present this viewpoint and even goes so far as to suggest many of the people he would include.

> How illuminating it would be to see the tableaux of Robinson and Rejlander followed by those of Lejaren and Hiller, Steichen and Sarra. Opposite of them would be Callahan's multiple exposures, Laughlin's fabulous gothic art, Telberg's ingenious, crude, and disturbing images of psychic interplay and Sommer's intense and accurate measurements of the vast range of reality we are always seeing (when we see it at all) out of the corner of our mind's eye.[38]

For Smith, the rich potential of "our mind's eye" differs from the "camera-eye"; for in the former one finds the capacity for thought, feeling, and emotion while in the latter there is only mechanical response. The argument does not advocate throwing away cameras, rather it seeks to blend the mechanical record-making of works of light with the soul of man. The argument does not deny the richness of imagery "picture takers" can create, but it does insist on the richness of imagery "picture makers" create, too. The argument seeks to broaden the scope of human understanding through photographic imagery.

In "Some Guideposts to the Appreciation of Photography"[39] one finds Smith borrowing again from the scientists. Here he adapts to photography some ideas of Thomas S. Kuhn from the preface to "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions."[40] These adaptations of Kuhn's ideas which form part of this article also form the basis for Smith's essay "Models for Critics."[41]

Once again Smith addresses the meaning of representation in photography. Here he makes a statement which cuts through to the essence of the problem his own imagery has been faced in being accepted.

> ...photography which by definition is or ought to be inseparable from light is also for most persons almost totally ensnared in the concept of "lighted objects." Attached to this law as a rider is the popular assumption that this connection between object and photograph must necessarily produce a recognizable photographic version of that object in the picture.
>
> A kind of visual Emancipation Proclamation in the 20th Century freed photography from the rider but not the law...Remaining, however, is a dictum that some connection between the photograph and the objects of everyday experience must be available in even the most obscure pictures or we have not been fairly dealt with.[42]

In 1965 Smith wrote one of the introductory essays for *Aaron Siskind: Photographer*. His "New Figures in a Classic Tradition" places Siskind's work, which although dependent on objects for their creation moves beyond objects in their meaning, into a long standing tradition with photography. The arguments he presents in his examination of Siskind further advance the arguments for the acceptability and importance of his own imagery, too. He accomplishes this, again, without reference to his own visual work. Yet the similarity in basic attitudes brought to Siskind's work and to Smith's is sufficiently strong that when both bodies are examined the links between them become clearly discernible. Both men have an understanding of the avenues of exploration opened by the revolution in art in the early part of the twentieth century. Both men found a great deal of intellectual and emotional sustenance in artwork informed by modernist principles and sensibilities. Both Siskind's personal life and his photographs are often linked to many abstract impressionist painters and particularly to his close friend, Franz Kline.[43] Both Smith's imagery and writing can be directly linked to Moholy-Nagy.

In commenting on the possibilities the "new" art opened up for photographers Smith stated:

> (Photographers) could study the new art for structures that were adaptable to traditional photography and incorporate these into photographs made directly from nature. Or, by one of several combinations of photographic and non-photographic techniques, they could create a synthetic imagery (more photo-picture than photographs) quite close in spirit to the new art, but a whole world away from traditional photography.[44]

What separates Smith's and Siskind's images then, is more related to technique than to substance. Siskind makes his photographs using much the same equipment and technique that the most traditional of traditional photographers utilized, a large format camera mounted on a tripod. The images are sharply focused and finely detailed. From Smith's perspective where Siskind departs from tradition is in his vision.

> Noting that descriptive illusionistic detail, when redundant or over-precise, tends to cancel out both the strength and mystery of a figurative art, Siskind resorted to neglected methods within the scope of straightforward traditional photographic technique to restore the necessary balance between what the camera pictures and what the photographer feels. Using carefully composed details from nature, he placed descriptive illusion completely at the service of lively new figures rich with contemporary meaning.[45]

Where Smith departs from tradition is both in his vision and in his technique; for although cameraless photographic images reach back to Fox Talbot, the use of Karo syrup and the use of color in a synthetic systematic exploration extends from Smith rather than reaching back to others.

Placed after "New Figures in a Classic Tradition" is "The Photographer's Subject." In this piece, originally presented as a lecture, Smith presents his definition of what a subject is in photography. One should be keenly aware that in this definition there is no reference to the recording of objects or any other more conventionally accepted notions of what subjects are in photography.

> "Subject," as used here refers to all aspects of individual human experience which are capable of being summed up in a visual form that may be pictured photographically. This includes experience of the senses and those experiences which are sometimes located "within" that are related to external sense experience only by analogy.[46]

This lecture, first delivered in 1972, represents the most precise statement Smith has made about what he views as "proper" material for subject within photography. In it he alludes to his concept of subject in relationship to his own imagery. For unless his own imagery is to be regarded merely as decorative one must view his imagery as dealing with experiences located "within" while referring to "external sense experience only by analogy."

Further, in this lecture Smith reveals part of his rationale for writing as well as for making images. This may be subconscious on his part, yet it seems validated by the tone and substance of many of his essays.

> The central value (of one's subject) will be demonstrated by consistent use of every device that supports it and the rejection of every device that betrays it.
>
> It is, in my judgement, unfortunate and nonproductive, to fail to practice one's "subject" in every dimension of which one is capable.[47]

And, writing on and teaching photography are perhaps two of the best means of changing attitudes, of presenting ones notion of subject, content and approach to the public.

Having laid out Smith's position as imagemaker *Henry Holmes Smith: Selected Critical Articles* concludes with "Trees and Seeds," an essay in which the focus shifts from attempts to explicate the potentials of a medium to the presentation of a warning about the possible dangers of a market-place orientation by photographers. It is an essay which helps to explain partly why Smith has not exhibited his work more often.

> Public display of what we do may stop us when we ought to be on our way. Exhibition is not on our way. It is at best a harmless side path, a part of the general market-place that gives us false notions of what we are really about.[48]

Knowing the indifference Smith's kind of image has received by the tastemakers of his generation one is left, too, with a feeling that he has presented the intellectual side of the argument and not the emotional. All too often people are not fully cognizant that what has been deemed acceptable by the tastemakers in photography *has become* the medium's visible history and heritage. What has been acceptable for most of this century has been the straight photograph as exemplified by the work of Edward Weston. As the acceptance of the non-manipulated camera originated photographic image grew, the general acceptability of other kinds of photographic statements diminished. The problem, of course, is that even straight photography is highly manipulative, even if covertly so.

Photography is used as a means to record objects and events. It is used as a means to make conceptual notions concrete, to make the abstract more concrete, and the concrete more abstract. It is used to topographically examine the surfaces of our world, explore the innermost recesses of our minds, express emotion and negate emotion. It is made up of fragments of time/space, truth made from fiction and fiction made from truth. All this and more is encompassed by that ubiquitous medium referred to as photography.

Yet the medium has been generally perceived by the public tastemakers and through them the public at large to be more narrowly construed. Photography has suffered from canons of what is acceptable to photograph and what is an acceptable photograph. These defining and very much constraining parameters of

the medium have been, and to the extent that they still exist, shackles which hinder the aesthetic development of the medium and limit the framework under which the public can gain an understanding of the potentials of the medium.

From the time Fox Talbot fixed his first photogenic drawings and made his first camera originated images, there have been two competing methodologies operating within the medium. The first method uses the camera lens system to focus light onto light sensitive material. The second method uses light and light sensitive material without the mediation of a camera lens system to focus that light.[48] The methodology which has come to predominate is based upon the camera's ability to record the "likeness" of physical objects. This methodology has been raised by various tastemakers into an aesthetic position which asserts that the recording of objects in a form which has a concrete referent in the physical world is of a higher order of worth than a more pure recording of light and energy on light sensitive material.

By 1972, however, his aesthetic isolation was diminished. There were more photographers sensitive to the richness of possibility Smith's viewpoint represented. "Trees and Seeds," written for a group exhibition reflects Smith's sense of a growing community. The essay concludes with:

> Returning, now, to the journey along that high trail ridge, the inference may be that the trip is taken alone. Not so. All those kin of the spirit are on the same ridge, my companions, your companions, high up there all together. This makes a rightful company, worthy joint venture and that's what this group is.[50]

Once a community exists, a sense of isolation diminishes and that particular struggle is over. It becomes a time to reflect, to look back, to begin to act more the historian and less the critic. It becomes a time to try to place the struggle into perspective. It seems altogether fitting then that when in 1975 Smith wrote an introductory essay to the book *Photographs of Moholy-Nagy: From the Collection of William Larson* he chose to present the historical background to the work of his mentor, the prejudices against it, and some interpretative insights into it. "Across the Atlantic and Out of the Woods: Moholy-Nagy's Contribution to Photography in the United States" presents not just the historical case for Moholy-Nagy but the one for Smith as well.

And the interpretive statements largely describe Smith's work too. Of Moholy-Nagy's photograms, the form of image most directly related to Smith's refraction "drawings" he wrote:

> Through the photogram, Moholy leads us into the reaches of these solar spaces using dark for light. Into the solar plexus, outward to the solar system, both of which are barely explored, hardly known and charged with energy and mystery, these remarkable pictures take us. Visual spaceships for the imagination.[51]

Does not this description conjure up his own *Giant* (Figure 1), *Mother and Son* (Figure 2), *Pair II* (Figure 3), and *Grotesque* (Figure 4)? Does not this description provide a metaphor which explicates and illuminates the imagery of the student, beyond the reaches but not beyond the hopes of his master?

Asking the right question is a very difficult thing. Yet it would seem that many of the questions Smith has been asking for fifty years have been the right ones. His guiding principles are simple: human beings are capable of an infinite variety of expressive activities; and the definition of photography is based upon light, the modulation of light and light sensitive material. Consequently, photographs may take on many forms, may ask many questions, may reveal many truths. The search for truth in photography requires that one be open to accept the infinity of possibilities as valid expressions of human beings.

Perhaps more than any other person, in at least the middle portion of twentieth century, Smith has been leading that search. In opening himself to the vast potentials of human expression, he helped to open the doors for his students. Largely between the openness of himself and his students, a pandora's box of expressive potential has been released to an entire culture. Finally, in the twilight of his life, the dialogue of differences Smith spent a lifetime working toward is beginning to emerge. It is to be hoped that Smith's audience though fit will not for much longer be few.

NOTES

Author's comment:

The papers of Henry Holmes Smith form one of the major collections of the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona. When the notation *HHS Papers* appears in the notes the material cited is from his collection. The material is copyrighted by Henry Holmes Smith and may not be used without the permission of Henry Holmes Smith and the Center for Creative Photography.

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FOOTNOTES

[1]Henry Holmes Smith and Wilson Hicks, "Photographs and Public," *Aperture* 2:3 (1953), p. 9. This is a two part article. Each part is individually authored.

[2]A complete breakdown by style of Smith's articles would be a very complex task. There are elements of the three cited styles in many articles, yet few totally fall into one stylistic approach. Since my concern is more with the content of Smith's writing, I cite here an example of an article which has lists, one which is mostly characteristic of intellectual argumentation, and one which by the time it concludes with its discussion of myth, sex and emotion is evocative of a stream of consciousness style.
A. "Critical Difficulties: Some Problems with Passing Judgement and Taking Issue," *Afterimage*, Summer 1978, pp. 17-19.
B. "Light Study: Based on an Illustrated Lecture from 1947," T.S., n.d. (transcribed from the original notes in the 1970s) HHS Papers.

C. "Traumas of Fair Women and Other Visions: The Dater/Welpott Portraits of Urban Women," in Dater, Judy and Jack Welpott. *Women and Other Visions: Photographs by Judy Dater and Jack Welpott* (New York: Morgan and Morgan, 1975).

[3]By sensibility I mean the attitude brought to the picture making process combined with the emotive, psychological interaction that occurs between the image and the viewer.

[4]For representative articles concerned with education and education issues see:

Henry Holmes Smith, "What the Old Have to Tell the Young," T.S. April 1979 based on Smith's 1979 Keynote address to the National conference of the Society for Photographic Education, Ft. Worth, Texas.

Henry Holmes Smith, "X1 Zero in Photography," in *Henry Holmes Smith: Selected Critical Articles*, Tucson, Ariz.: Center for Creative Photography, 1977, p. 3. Originally published in *Photographer's Choice*, No. 1 (Spring 1959).

[5]For articles concerned with photojournalism see:

Henry Holmes Smith, "The Fiction of Fact and Vice Versa," T.S., 1962. HHS Papers. This was published in *Infinity* in 1962.

Henry Holmes Smith, "Problems of the Contemporary Photojournalist," T.S. HHS Papers.

Henry Holmes Smith, "Two for the Photojournalists," *Aperture* 8:4 (1960), pp. 188-192.

[6]See:

Henry Holmes Smith, "Museum Taste and the Taste of Our Time, " *Aperture* 10:2 (1962), pp. 52-55.

Henry Holmes Smith, "The Wasp Esthetic and the Vanishing Photograph," T.S., Dec. 10, 1972, HHS Papers.

[7]I thank Jack Welpott for this notion of apologist in relation to Smith. I think it fits him perfectly and have decided to use it in the same metaphorical spirit Welpott mentioned it to me.

Smith's mimeo press publications indicate that he was more interested in an exchange of ideas rather than in an exchange of money.

The reader should consult *Photographer's Exhibition News-Letter*, Vol. 1, Nos. 1-3 (1960-1962), *Photographer/s Choice*, No. 1 (1959).

[8]Henry Holmes Smith, letter to Minor White, 12 Sept. 1953. A copy of this letter is with the HHS Papers.

[9]Minor White, letter to Henry Holmes Smith, 9 Sept. 1953. A copy of this letter is with the HHS Papers.

[10]In a letter to Smith, dated 8 Feb. 53, Minor White wrote:

> Congratz on the little leaflett (sic) called "On Photoy." That is a delightful little number. Best of all it shows that somebody is doing some thinking about pictures.
>
> What do you think of taking these same subjects and enlarging on them a little for APERTURE?...This is an excellent approach to "Reading the Photo" and I hope you find time to write it out completely and for publication in APERTURE.

A copy of this letter is with the HHS Papers.

[11]See Jonathan Green's article, "Aperture in the 50's: The Word and the Way." *Afterimage* 6:8 (March 1979), pp. 8-13, and Henry Holmes Smith, "Letter to the Editor," *Afterimage* 7:1 and 2 (Summer 1979), p. 2.

[12]The reader is referred to the Henry Holmes Smith/Minor White correspondence with the HHS Papers.

[13]Henry Holmes Smith, "Photographs and Public," p. 12.

[14]John Ward, *The Criticism of Photography as Art: The Photographs of Jerry Uelsmann*. (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 1970).

Terry Barrett, "Reading as a Method of Photographic Criticism," *Exposure* 15:4 (December, 1977), pp. 3-5.

[15]Henry Holmes Smith, "Image, Obscurity and Interpretation," *Aperture* 5:4 (1957), pp. 136-147. In this article Smith refers his readers to: I.A. Richards, *Practical Criticism*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1929, pp. 12-15, 292-315, 328-329).

[16]Henry Holmes Smith, "The Fiction of Fact and Vice Versa," T.S., 1962, pp. 7-8. See footnote 5 for full citation.

[17]Henry Holmes Smith, *Related Papers on the Classification and Appreciation of Photographs and Photographers* (Bloomington, Ind.: Photographer's Exhibition Service), 1963.

A copy of this mimeo press publication is in the Archives at the International museum of Photography at George Eastman House, Rochester, New York.

Henry Holmes Smith, "Models for Critic's" in Van Deren Coke, ed., *One Hundred Years of Photographic History: Essays in Honor of Beaumont Newhall* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1975), pp. 140-143.

[18]Henry Holmes Smith, "Models for Critics," p. 141.

[19]Henry Holmes Smith, "Two for the Photojournalists," *Aperture* 8:4 (1960), pp. 188-192.

[20] Henry Holmes Smith, "Problems of the Contemporary Photo-journalist," T.S., n.d. These quotes are taken from a version of the lecture re-written after the lecture Smith gave to the National Press Photographers Association in New Orleans. This version and a version which is part TS and part MS are both with the HHS Papers.

[21] Henry Holmes Smith, "'Photopatterns' Composed from Shots of Mundane Architecture Multiply Available Design Sources." *Design Magazine* 35:1 (May 1933), pp. 10-11.

Henry Holmes Smith, "How Shall We Use Montage?" *Design Magazine* 35:6 (December 1933), pp. 21, 27.

Henry Holmes Smith, "Research Bulletin PM-1" (Columbus, Ohio: Design Research Laboratory), May 1935. A copy of this is with the HHS Papers.

Henry Holmes Smith, "Solarization Process: For Unique and Sensational Effects," *Minicam Monthly* 3:2 (October 1939), pp. 26-31, 78-91 (with author's illustrations).

[22] Henry Holmes Smith, "Reading the Photograph," in Henry Holmes Smith, ed., *On Photography* (Bloomington, Ind.: Henry Holmes Smith, 1953), p. 7.

[23] Many of Smith's colleagues and former students spoke on his voracious reading habits which encompassed an almost encyclopedic variety of subjects. Robert Fichter, one of Smith's former students, remarked in an interview on April 13, 1979 that he was amazed how Smith would bring materials into class from seemingly unrelated fields and build bridges into photography.

When Smith first came to Indiana University he began to study for an M.F.A. After deciding that his own department did not have the courses he felt were necessary to bridge his knowledge gaps, he began taking courses during the summer with literary critics who were brought in for special sessions. This was where he came into contact with I.A. Richards, Kenneth Burke, Francis Ferguson and William Empson.

In our correspondence, Smith has referred to the importance of Weston La Barre's *The Ghost Dance*, to his thinking about myth, symbol, culture and religion.

Recently Smith has discovered the writings of Rene' Thom on Catastrophe Theory. He sees a relationship between this theory in mathematics and his own work.

[24] These articles dealing with image issues are to be distinguished from his articles on pedagogy, and politics within the photography and art communities.

[25] Henry Holmes Smith, et al., "The Experience of Photographs: 5 Photographs by Aaron Siskind--5 Readings by: Kurt Safranski, Henry Holmes Smith, Myron Martin, Walter Chappell, Sam Tung Wu," *Aperture* 5:3 (1957), pp. 112-130. The section Smith wrote can be found on pp. 117-119.

[26] Henry Holmes Smith, "Representation in Photography," *Quartet*, no. 2 (Winter issue 1963). Includes reproduction of *Pseudoform (Grotesque)*, 1950; *Mother and Son*, 1951; and *Pair*, 1952.

Smith's concept of representation in photography is also presented in "Some Guideposts to the Appreciation of Photography" first published in Smith's *Related Papers on Classification and Appreciation of Photographs and Photographers* in 1963 and reprinted in *Henry Holmes Smith: Selected Critical Articles*, 1977, pp. 12-19.

[27] Ibid.

[28] The reader is referred to Henry Holmes Smith, "Museum Taste and the Taste of Our Time," *Aperture* 10:2 (1962), pp. 52-55; and to "The Wasp Esthetic and the Vanishing Photograph," TS, December 10, 1962. A copy of this TS is with HHS Papers.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Henry Holmes Smith, *Henry Holmes Smith: Selected Critical Articles*, Terence Pitts, ed. (Tucson, Ariz.: Center for Creative Photography, 1977).

[33] Ibid.

[34] At the 1979 National Conference of the Society for Photographic Education, during a question and answer session following Smith's keynote address, he angered some people in the audience by repeating essentially the charge he made in this article; that unthinking, unexamined approaches are detrimental and that those who call themselves professionals and teachers must open themselves to ideas as well as to technology, to discipline as well as to emotionalism, to insight as well as to oversight. It appeared that most of those angered did not understand his basic premise. His own frustration with this problem lead to an exchange on both sides that bordered on the vitriolic.

[35] Henry Holmes Smith, "Museum Taste and the Taste of Our Time," in *Henry Holmes Smith: Selected Critical Articles*, p. 9. Originally published in *Aperture* 10:2 (1962).

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., p. 11.

[38] Ibid.

[39] See footnote 26 for citation.

[40] Smith cites:

Thomas S. Kuhn, "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions," in *Foundations of the Unity of Science* (International Encyclopedia of Unified Science, Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press), Vol. II, No. 2, pp. ix-xi.

41 See footnote 17.

42 Henry Holmes Smith, "Some Guideposts to the Appreciation of Photography," *Henry Holmes Smith: Selected Critical Articles*, p. 15.

43 The reader is referred to Carl Chiarenza's article: "Aaron Siskind's Photographs in Homage to Franz Kline." *Afterimage* 3:6 (Dec. 1975), pp. 8-13; to Harold Rosenberg's introduction to *Aaron Siskind Photographs* (New York: Horizon Press, 1959); and to essays by Nathan Lyons and Thomas B. Hess in *Aaron Siskind: Photographer* (Rochester: George Eastman House, 1965).

44 Henry Holmes Smith, "New Figures in a Classic Tradition," *Henry Holmes Smith: Selected Critical Articles*, p. 21. Originally published in *Aaron Siskind: Photographer* (Rochester: George Eastman House, 1965).

45 Ibid., p. 23.

46 Henry Holmes Smith, "The Photographer's 'Subject,'" *Henry Holmes Smith: Selected Critical Articles*, p. 27.

47 Ibid., p. 29.

48 Henry Holmes Smith, "Trees and Seeds," *Henry Holmes Smith: Selected Critical Articles*, p. 31, originally published in an exhibition catalog, *Meridian 122* (Berkeley, 1972).

49 For a time in the mid 1800s painters were known to have explored the cliche-verre technique, a technique in which a glass plate coated with an opaque adhesive layer was scratched with an etching needle. This drawing on glass was then used as a photographic negative to produce positive prints. The painters were: Eugene Delacroix, Jean Baptiste Camille Corot, Charles Francois Daubigny, Theodore Rousseau, and Jean Francois Millet. This kind of exploration demonstrates, that along with the photogenic drawings of Fox Talbot, people in the mid-1800s had begun to explore the expressive possibilities of photosensitive materials apart from the transcriptive potential of camera generated imagery. For a fuller discussion of this see W. Rotzler, *Photography as Artistic Experiment: From Fox Talbot to Moholy-Nagy* (Garden City, New York: Amphoto, 1976).

50 Ibid., p. 32

51 Henry Holmes Smith, "Across the Atlantic and Out of the Woods: Moholy Nagy's Contribution to Photography in the United States," in Leland Rice and David Steadman, eds., *Photographs of Moholy-Nagy: From the Collection of William Larson* (Claremont, Calif.: Pomona College, 1975), p. 17.

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